

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

April 26, 2022

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Jr.  
Chairman  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture,  
Rural Development, Food and Drug  
Administration, and Related Agencies  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Dr. Andy Harris  
Acting Ranking Member  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture,  
Rural Development, Food and Drug  
Administration, and Related Agencies  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Fortenberry:

As Members of Congress with an interest in the Chesapeake Bay and the rivers and streams that feed it, we thank the subcommittee for its legacy of leadership with respect to the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay. Chesapeake Bay states are heavily invested in implementing the Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint designed to restore this national treasure. Federal partnership to support this complex, cross-state effort is key to their success. The Bay restoration effort is at a critical moment in time. While the Bay has made significant strides toward a shared clean water goal, more work and resources are needed to meet the goals outlined in the Chesapeake Bay Agreement by 2025. To maintain the trust and collaboration of state partners and keep the momentum of their efforts, we urge the subcommittee to include full funding for mandatory programs and at least the following funding levels for technical assistance as described below.

## **NRCS Conservation Technical Assistance – \$1.2 billion with report language**

To maximize the impact of conservation programs and promote healthy and productive lands, landowners need access to the expertise and resources that Conservation Technical Assistance provides. Conservation Technical Assistance provides landowners resources necessary to reduce erosion and damage, improve long-term sustainability, and solve land management problems. Given the critical role Conservation Technical Assistance plays in maximizing the impact of other conservation programs, we respectfully ask that the subcommittee allocate \$1.2 billion for the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Conservation Operations program.

To effectively utilize the increased funding Congress allocated for Critical Conservation Areas in the 2018 Farm Bill, we also respectfully request that the committee include the following report language so that these areas can compete for funding:

*“The committee supports Critical Conservation Areas and the collaborative regional approach to address common natural resources goals while maintaining or improving agricultural productivity. The committee encourages NRCS to provide Conservation Technical Assistance additional funds to Critical Conservation Areas to address conservation planning backlogs.”*

## **NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**

Through the EQIP program, USDA shares the costs for installing water pollution-reducing practices on farms, a key element of all state Blueprints. On average, 40 percent of bay watershed farmers who want to install these practices are turned away by NRCS because cost-share funding is exhausted.

#### **NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program**

The Conservation Stewardship Program helps agricultural producers maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resource concerns like those in the Blueprint.

#### **NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**

The RCPP is a program that funds conservation-focused partnerships. Within this program, the Chesapeake Bay Watershed has been designated as a Critical Conservation Area (CCA). It is therefore eligible to receive a portion of CCA funding for projects that help reduce nutrient and sediment runoff that impacts the Chesapeake Bay as well as the local rivers and streams that feed it.

#### **FSA Conservation Reserve Program/Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program**

Through the FSA Conservation Reserve Program and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, the federal government partners with Bay states and landowners to support the installation of a key practice in states' watershed implementation plans: riparian buffers. These buffers are one of the most cost-efficient and effective methods for reducing pollution to and improving the health of local rivers and streams and the bay.

#### **Chesapeake Resilient Farms Initiative**

Finally, we respectfully request that the committee include the following report language to support the deployment of these programs at scale in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, enhancing resilience of farmland while also protecting and restoring waterways.

*The committee recognizes the important role of voluntary conservation practices in protecting and restoring waterways, especially when deployed at scale. To enhance the resiliency of farmland and reduce nutrient and sediment pollution in line with the most recent Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement, the committee directs the Department of Agriculture to establish a Chesapeake Resilient Farms Initiative (CRFI). To maintain productive working lands throughout the watershed, the CRFI shall leverage increased financial and technical assistance for agricultural producers to protect natural resources. The committee further directs the Department to focus efforts on the most effective basins and prioritize conservation practices that improve water quality, increase carbon storage, and build on-farm resilience as part of the initiative.*

Thanks to a strong federal-state partnership, Chesapeake Bay restoration efforts are showing great progress. But we need to maintain this partnership to ensure that both agricultural lands and the Chesapeake Bay are ecologically thriving and economically productive. The 2018 Farm Bill was an unequivocal success for agricultural conservation, and it is imperative that we follow through on the important gains made in that legislation. We thank you for supporting this

essential partnership with Bay states and producers in an extraordinary effort that will benefit current and future generations.

Sincerely,



Robert C. "Bobby" Scott  
Member of Congress



John P. Sarbanes  
Member of Congress



Robert J. Wittman  
Member of Congress



Gerald E. Connolly  
Member of Congress



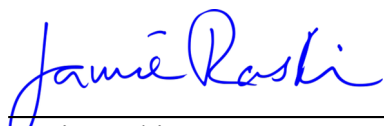
Anthony G. Brown  
Member of Congress



Elaine G. Luria  
Member of Congress



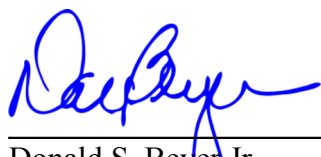
Antonio Delgado  
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin  
Member of Congress



Lisa Blunt Rochester  
Member of Congress



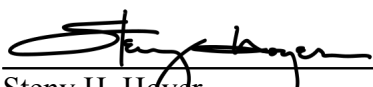
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Donald S. Beyer Jr.  
Member of Congress



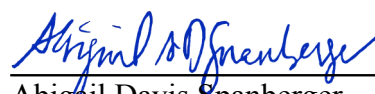
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David J. Trone  
Member of Congress



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Steny H. Hoyer  
Member of Congress



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Abigail Davis Spanberger  
Member of Congress



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A. Donald McEachin  
Member of Congress



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Lloyd Smucker  
Member of Congress



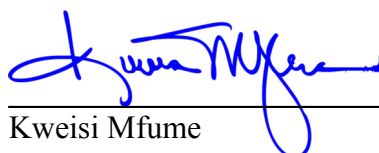
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C. A. Dutch Ruppersberger  
Member of Congress



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Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress



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Kweisi Mfume  
Member of Congress